

VZCZCXRO2958
PP RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHBC #0118/01 3501622
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 161622Z DEC 07
FM BASRAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0657
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0240
INFO RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDHP/DIA DHP-1 WASHINGTON DC
RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0046
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0691

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000118

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2017
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BASRAH PROVINCE RETURNED TO IRAQI CONTROL

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3776 B. BASRAH 117

BASRAH 00000118 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Hal Howard, A/Director, Regional Embassy Office -
Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

¶1. (U) Basrah province was officially returned to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) December 16 at a well run ceremony held at the Basrah Air Station. Basrah is the fourth and final province in MND(SE), and the ninth of Iraq's eighteen provinces, to undergo a security transfer. UK Foreign Minister David Miliband, UK Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Prentice, PolMilCouns Marcie Ries, members of the Provincial Council, Iraqi Generals Mohan Fahad (Basrah Operations Commander) and Police Chief Jalil Shueil, as well as a large local and international press contingent attended. The event was broadcast live on Iraqi state television.

¶2. (U) The highlight of the event were keynote speeches by MND(SE) commander MG Graham Binns, Iraqi National Security Advisor Muwafaq al-Rubaie, and Basrah Governor Muhammad al-Wa'eli followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) transferring civil authority to the governor. (Note: LTG Mohan and Governor Wa'eli signed a separate MOU December 15 acknowledging that Mohan, as the GOI representative, was responsible for security. See Ref A. End note.) Following the signing ceremony, a military parade was held at Basrah Palace for an audience of several hundred, marking the first public use of the Palace since 2003.

¶3. (U) Rubaie's comments emphasized the need for continued security progress:

-- the central government (not the provincial) would be responsible for security - Iraqi Police would respond to problems first, backed up by the Iraqi Army, and if necessary the British forces would intervene upon the approval of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki;
-- the rule of law needed to be upheld;
-- only the government should have weapons; and
-- political parties needed to unite and "crack down on militias and religious extremists."

Rubaie also asked the Coalition to focus on economic development calling 2008 a "year of reconstruction. He noted that the

Basrah Development Forum, held two days previously, was a good start towards Basrah's reconstruction (Ref B).

¶4. (U) Wa'eli reiterated the need for the rule of law to be upheld, pledged the provincial government's support to the ISF, and also urged the central government to support Basrah's economic development. Binns said that the UK came in 2003 to "rid Basrah of its enemies and was now returning it back to its friends." He also noted that the UK role would be "one of assistance, not interference," and pledge the UK assistance to continue training ISF. During the press questions, Binns noted that "the legal right to detain and intern combatants is enshrined in the UNSC resolution," that periodic reviews of an internee's status were held, and that MND(SE) has released nearly 1,500 prisoners. Rubaie added that the GoI is reviewing a plan to release two-thirds of the GOI's 24,000 detainees and the Coalition's 26,000 by the end of next year. This would be a judicial rather than a political matter, he said.

¶5. (C) According to MND-SE, British forces currently number 4,500, but will drop to 2,500 in the spring of 2008. With the handover to Iraqi control, the British will move into "overwatch," which they describe as "training and mentoring the Iraqi Security Forces; securing supply routes and helping police the Iran-Iraq border; and maintaining the ability to come to the assistance of the ISF if they are called upon." The UK POLAD to MND(SE) told poloff that their version of 'overwatch' will significantly differ from U.S. practice in post-PIC provinces (i.e., U.S. forces embedding with ISF and continued kinetic operations), and the UK anticipates conflicts with MNC-I regarding operational expectations.

¶6. (C/NF) Comment: We remain guardedly optimistic about Basrah's post-PIC future. The attendance of nearly all Provincial Council members is a positive sign of political reconciliation, most of Jaysh al-Mahdi appears to be adhering to Muqtada al-Sadr's ceasefire, and IDF attacks against MND(SE) have dropped over the last six months. In a private meeting

BASRAH 00000118 002.2 OF 002

with the governor, the provincial council and other local notables, NSA Rubaie underscored his message about the necessity for eliminating militias and for political reconciliation. The best way to ensure Basrah does not backslide post-PIC is by eliminating the militia influences upon the ISF and improving their capacity to handle security. End Comment.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Marcie Ries has cleared this cable.
HOWARD